

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 ADDIS ABABA 003837

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E AND IO
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [KPKO](#) [ET](#) [ER](#) [UNSC](#) [EE](#) [BORDER](#)

SUBJECT: UNSC MISSION TO ETHIOPIA-ERITREA BREAKS NO NEW
GROUND

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 3769

[B](#). ADDIS ABABA 3760

[C](#). ADDIS ABABA 3725

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Japan's UN PermRep Amb. Kenzio Oshima told UN Security Council members and troop-contributing countries in Addis that his November 7-8 trip to Ethiopia and Eritrea on behalf of the Council was "technical" in nature, and did not aim at promoting political dialogue. Providing a readout of his meeting with Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin, Oshima said Ethiopia's position on border demarcation had not changed: Ethiopia accepted the boundary commission's decision "in principle", which was not the same as "final and binding." Despite its opposition to immediate demarcation, Oshima praised Ethiopia's "restraint" in responding to Eritrea's restrictions on UNMEE, noting that UNMEE characterizes Ethiopia's military deployments as "defensive."

UNMEE officials, meanwhile, were more vocal in highlighting UNMEE's inability to monitor 60 per cent of the border, especially military movements on the Eritrean side. According to UNMEE Force Commander Singh, both sides have activated airfields and air defenses; moreover, each side appears to have deployed two additional divisions, supplementing existing troops along the border. UNMEE SRSG Legwaila warned that UNMEE's withdrawal would be "the quickest way to war," as Ethiopia threatens to re-occupy the Temporary Security Zone separating the two countries if UNMEE leaves. While France agrees that UNMEE's withdrawal would be "a catastrophe that must be avoided at all costs," Japan believes that revising UNMEE's mandate could generate cost savings. The UNMEE SRSG strongly opposes the current Greek draft UNSC resolution, believing that it comes too late after the issue was first brought to the Security Council a month ago, and that it would only "enrage" both parties. UNSC members voiced support for a U.S. special envoy; UNMEE SRSG underscored that the envoy should represent the United States, not the United Nations, as Eritrea had rejected the previous UN envoy as "illegal." Charge replied that U.S. would seek an envoy, whether U.S. or UN or both, that Eritrea and Ethiopia would accept. UNMEE again pleaded for satellite imagery of the border in order to improve the safety and security of UNMEE troops. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) At a November 7 meeting hosted by the Charge, Japan's UN PermRep Amb. Kenzo Oshima, Chairman of the UN Security Council's Working Group on Peace-keeping Operations, briefed heads of mission from UNSC members and troop-contributing countries (TCC) on his meeting earlier that day with Ethiopian FM Seyoum and his expected visit the following day to Asmara. Senior officials from the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) accompanied Oshima, including Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) Amb. Legwaila Joseph Legwaila, Deputy SRSG Amb. Azouz Ennifar, and UNMEE Force Commander Major-General Rajender Singh.

UNSC MISSION ONLY "TECHNICAL"

[1](#)3. (SBU) Amb. Oshima defined his mission as "technical": he would meet with UNMEE, UNSC members, TCCs, and, if possible, representatives of Ethiopia (GOE) and Eritrea (GSE). His most important message was to push Eritrea (GSE) to lift its restrictions on UNMEE, while expressing the UNSC's confidence in how UNMEE troops performed under difficult circumstances. "I'm not here for any negotiations or political discussions," he declared. Oshima had met with Ethiopian FM Seyoum, and was awaiting confirmation from the GSE of appointments the next day in Asmara. (NOTE: A November 8 UNMEE press briefing confirmed that Oshima met with Colonel Zacarias Ogbagaber, Eritrea's Chief of the Commission for Coordination with UNMEE, and with presidential advisor Yemane Ghebremeskel. END NOTE.) UNMEE officials explained that Oshima would not visit the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ), which lies entirely within Eritrea, as doing so required too much transit time, due to Ethiopia and Eritrea's refusal to allow direct flights between their two countries.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Reviewing UNSC actions, Oshima said "operational problems affecting TCCs", resulting from the GSE's ban of UNMEE flight operations and other restrictions, were a "matter of great concern" to the UN. The UNSYG had reported

movements of troops in areas adjacent to the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ), he said, as well as "irregular movements" within the TSZ itself. He referred to the UNSC statement issued on October 4 (S/PRST/2005/47). No decision had been taken on a draft UNSC resolution proposed by Greece, he added, but despite different views, there was no disagreement among members that the GSE had to lift restrictions on UNMEE. In addition to addressing the "immediate issue" of the GSE's restrictions on UNMEE, the UNSC was concerned about the root cause of the stalemate between Ethiopia and Eritrea, he said, acknowledging that there was "frustration at the lack of progress in demarcation".

15. (SBU) Oshima said he would report his findings to the UNSC, but noted that the SRSRG had already reported recent border developments to that body. Possible next steps included considering whether to approve a new resolution, appoint a special envoy, or propose that "witnesses" to previous agreements either meet or intervene. Oshima said no decision had been reached yet, after consultations between the UNSYG and the USG, on whom the envoy would represent.

NO CHANGE IN ETHIOPIA'S RESERVATIONS ON BORDER DEMARCATION

16. (SBU) Oshima said he had a "good meeting" on November 7 with GOE FM Seyoum, but reported no change in Ethiopia's position from its October 31 letter to the UNSC. According to Oshima, Seyoum continued to assert that actual demarcation of the border would require "readjustments," e.g., to ensure that a village not be divided in two. Seyoum also had said that the border issue was not the sole issue between Ethiopia and Eritrea: economic trade, normalization of relations, and access to the sea were also key.

17. (SBU) Oshima said that while it would be useful if the GOE were to state publicly that it accepted the Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Commission's (EEBC) decision as "final and binding," as stipulated by the Algiers peace accord, the GOE continues to agree with the decision only "in principle". Highlighting the difference, Oshima questioned whether "I will marry you in principle" meant the same as "I will marry you unconditionally." Describing himself as an "expert in linguistic contortions," SRSRG Legwaila agreed that this represented a significant caveat. Legwaila said mutual acceptance of the EEBC decision would be a good basis for parties to begin dialogue. Not accepting the finality of the EEBC decision was a violation of article 415 of the peace agreement, Legwaila added.

18. (SBU) SRSRG Legwaila expressed concern that FM Seyoum had repeatedly told him, DSRSG Ennifar, and the UNMEE Force Commander that "the Boundary Commission will never open offices in Ethiopia," when in fact the EEBC has two offices in Ethiopia that have been closed as a cost-saving measure. As the EEBC requires offices on both sides of the border for demarcation, Seyoum's comment challenges the notion that Ethiopia is ready to demarcate the 85 per cent of the border that is not in dispute, Legwaila said.

19. (SBU) Asked if he was satisfied with Ethiopia's reaction to Eritrea's restrictions, Oshima said FM Seyoum "reassured us of restraint." Ethiopia had responded "appropriately," he said, adding that both the UNMEE SRSRG and Force Commander had characterized Ethiopia's redeployment of forces as "defensive."

110. (SBU) According to Oshima, Eritrea's charge d'affaires in New York had told him that the GSE had proposed a bilateral arrangement to Ethiopia, but had not pursued it further, as Ethiopia had rejected it. SRSRG Legwaila observed that Ethiopia had, on several occasions, proposed swapping territory, and that the final point of PM Meles' five-point plan proposed dialogue, which Eritrea had rejected.

UNMEE CANNOT MONITOR ERITREAN MOVEMENTS

111. (SBU) SRSRG Legwaila interjected that the GSE's restriction on UNMEE flights prevented UNMEE from monitoring 60 per cent of the border. UNMEE could not determine whether Eritrea was now building up forces along its side, he said. On the Ethiopian side, there was "more transparency": UNMEE knew Ethiopia had been amassing troops since December 16, 2004. He noted that UNMEE had requested satellite imagery from the United States (ref C), as "there is no other alternative" to aerial surveillance. Without aerial surveillance, UNMEE Force Commander Singh said he would need 15 times more troops (i.e., 45,000) to monitor the border; even more would be needed if the GSE imposed further restrictions, such as allowing only foot patrols. Singh noted that UNMEE operated under Chapter VI (peaceful settlement of disputes) of the UN Charter, and therefore

depended on consent from both parties, which was now "incomplete." "We have lost our ability to serve as a tripwire, and to warn the international community," Singh lamented.

AIRFIELDS AND AIR DEFENSE ACTIVATED ON BOTH SIDES OF BORDER

¶12. (SBU) UNMEE Force Commander Singh outlined key military developments:

- Both sides had activated airfields and air defenses.
- Ethiopia had deployed two additional divisions in the western sector, along with two special forces units. These were in addition to eleven divisions deployed along the border in December 2004, and seven more divisions added in January 2005. Singh noted that PM Meles had notified him and the SRSG of the January deployment.
- Eritrean troops were now deployed on (rather than near) the border, and maintaining and preparing defenses.
- UNMEE had recently observed one to two new Eritrean divisions in areas adjacent to the TSZ, but now could no longer locate them.
- Within the TSZ itself, the GSE had restricted UNMEE from patrolling the western and central sectors at night. UNMEE had also curtailed challenge inspections in many areas.

UNMEE,S WITHDRAWAL WOULD BE "QUICKEST WAY TO WAR"

¶13. (SBU) SRSG Legwaila cautioned that allowing UNMEE's withdrawal would be the "quickest way to war," as the Government of Ethiopia had pledged to reoccupy the TSZ in the event UNMEE withdrew (ref A). The TSZ was intended to keep Eritrean troops 25 kilometers from the border, he said. Current restrictions hampering UNMEE's freedom of movement, especially during the night, were thus not only "making nonsense of the Temporary Security Zone," but also breeding suspicion, which could ultimately "force war quickly," he said. Legwaila said movements of troops, tanks, or aircraft were a secondary concern, compared to the GSE's flight ban on UNMEE; reversing the ban would allow UNMEE to monitor and assess such movements.

¶14. (SBU) France's ambassador to Ethiopia remarked that the withdrawal of UNMEE would be "a catastrophe that must be avoided at all costs." He added that many parties had attempted to reach out to Eritrea, without success.

¶15. (SBU) As chairman of the UNSC's working group on peace-keeping operations, Amb. Oshima said he had convened a separate meeting with TCCs. Five recent casualties among UNMEE peace-keepers prompted concerns that TCCs could withdraw their contingents, he said, as the GSE's flight ban included medical evacuations.

¶16. (SBU) Amb. Oshima said Japan was concerned about UNMEE,s \$186 million annual cost, as peace-keeping operations cost \$5 billion annually. Mandate review could generate savings, he said.

¶17. (SBU) India's ambassador to Ethiopia agreed with SRSG Legwaila that Ethiopia would reoccupy the TSZ if UNMEE withdrew. He did not directly threaten to withdraw Indian troops (who, along with a contingent from Jordan, comprise the majority of UNMEE's military strength), but questioned what UNMEE,s future would be if it could not fulfill its mandate. India advocated a meeting of "friends" of Ethiopia and Eritrea, and launching a parallel political process to address the current impasse. (NOTE: No representative of Jordan attended Oshima's briefing. END NOTE.)

NEXT STEPS: U.S. ENVOY INSTEAD OF NEW UNSC RESOLUTION

¶18. (SBU) Addressing possible next steps, SRSG Legwaila said he strongly opposed the draft Greek resolution, saying it would simply "enrage" the parties. "This resolution has now outlived whatever usefulness it might have (had)," he said. Legwaila said Ethiopian FM Seyoum was "violently opposed" to the proposed resolution (ref B), and that the GSE's reaction would be even worse. The UNSC should have passed a restriction solely addressing the GSE,s flight ban on October 5-6, he continued, in conjunction with its presidential statement, in response to the call for "emergency action". Now, he added, the proposed resolution was too late and irrelevant. "We should forget about the resolution and do something else," he said. Charge observed that the UNSC did not want to make a delicate situation more difficult. Amb. Oshima remarked that the "reflexes of the Security Council" are to pass repeated resolutions and condemnations, but he questioned whether a strong resolution would help address the current situation.

19. (SBU) UK Ambassador Bob Dewar expressed reservations about a meeting of "witnesses." While this was an important option, it needed to be approached carefully, he said, "to ensure it adds value."

20. (SBU) Legwaila argued that any new special envoy should represent the United States, not the United Nations. Both Ethiopia and Eritrea had said the United States was the only interlocutor it could accept, he noted. Thus, "it would be absolutely tragic" if the UNSYG appointed another UN special envoy who failed. Legwaila explained that Eritrea considers the UN "irrelevant" and perceived former Canadian foreign minister Lloyd Axworthy's earlier appointment as UN Special Envoy as an attempt by the UNSYG to renegotiate the EEBC decision. Some GSE officials thus considered Axworthy's appointment as UN Special Envoy illegal, Legwaila said. "No one should ask the Secretary-General to appoint a special envoy," given the circumstances of the earlier UN envoy's failure, Legwaila said. If a second UN envoy failed, Legwaila said, then even someone with the stature of the former President Bush would not succeed. "The United States must take a chance for peace," Legwaila concluded, urging the appointment of a U.S. envoy.

21. (SBU) Charge told Legwaila that the key for the United States was not whether the envoy was UN or U.S./UN or U.S., but whether he was accepted by both sides. Brazil's ambassador said he supported bilateral (vice UN) intervention to address Ethiopia-Eritrea tensions, as well as consultations with academic experts. Norway poloff said his country supported a US envoy, whether US or UN-hatted, but that the envoy needed to make tough demands on both sides, and have the international community unite behind him.

22. (U) Greek ambassador noted that the Council of Europe had been able to enforce unpopular decisions on its members, who accepted them as binding; he questioned why demarcation of commonly accepted portions of the border could not begin. In response, SRSG Legwaila reiterated the well-established differences between the parties' positions on the EEBC decision:

- FM Meles has publicly stated that Ethiopia seeks dialogue prior to demarcation.
- Beginning in August 2003, Ethiopia refused to implement the EEBC's demarcation directives to the chief surveyor to fix lines along the border.
- Eritrea refuses to allow demarcation of the east, so long as Ethiopia refuses to allow demarcation of the entire border.

Legwaila underscored that in demarcation of the border, Ethiopia seeks adjustments in delimitation; and that the GOE's acceptance of the EEBC decision only "in principle" remained a major stumbling block.

23. (SBU) COMMENT: Amb. Oshima's "technical" visit on behalf of the UN Security Council provided him with a first-hand introduction to the issue in both countries and also clarified where each stands. The visit also demonstrated continuing UN commitment to avoid another war. Post continues to await guidance in response to UNMEE SRSG Legwaila's October 26 request to the USG for satellite imagery (ref C), as UNMEE troops would feel more secure if they had better information about the parties' troop deployments. END COMMENT.
HUDDLESTON